

# Seattle Light Rail Review Panel

## Meeting Notes for January 31, 2001

### Agenda Items

- Discussion of Design Guidelines for Southeast Stations
- LRRP Business: Discussion with Tuck Wilson, Director, Link Light Rail
- Design Development Briefing on Edmunds Station (Sound Transit)
- Presentation of Edmunds Street redesign options (SeaTran)

### Commissioners Present

Rick Sundberg, Chair  
Matthew Kitchen  
Carolyn Law  
Jay Lazerwitz  
Mimi Sheridan  
Don Royse  
Paul Tomita

### Staff Present

Debora Ashland, Sound Transit  
John Walser, Sound Transit  
Marty Curry, Planning Commission  
Cheryl Sizov, CityDesign  
Sue Kelly, CityDesign

The meeting began with Panel review of the meeting notes from the January 17, 2001 meeting. Jay asked that the notes be amended to include the Panel's request to see the ziggurat-design retaining wall again prior to 90% design in order to view the changes requested by the Panel. The meeting notes were then approved as amended.

### Design Guidelines for Southeast Seattle Link Stations

Cheryl updated the Panel on the status of the design guidelines for Southeast Seattle stations, noting that the guidelines are ready to publish as a draft Director's Rule for a 3-week public comment period, pending Panel approval to do so. Commissioners agreed that their comments were not so substantial that they couldn't be incorporated into the final draft, thereby giving Cheryl the go-ahead to publish. Jay expressed a desire to see the landscaping-related guidelines more strongly worded to "maximize" landscaping throughout the system, and to be more specific about requirements.

### Discussion with Central Link Director Tuck Wilson

Mary Jo Porter introduced Tuck Wilson, Director for Central Link, and introductions were made around the room. Tuck described his background and the projects he has worked on in other cities, including the Portland MAX system. He noted that all were high profile public projects that left a lasting imprint on the city. All had a strong interface with art and helped to create the character of the place. Link will do the same, and the Panel's work is helping to shape that vision.

I arrived on November 17<sup>th</sup> for a field trip and haven't been home since! My mission was, within 60 days, to secure a Federal Funding Grant Agreement from the Clinton administration. We needed more description of the project cost and the time it would take to build. The Federal Transportation Administration worked alongside Sound Transit to revise the application for review. The agreement was that the Sound Transit Board would approve the scope and cost of the project if they had reasonable assurances that it would also be approved by the Federal government for funding. Some of the new Washington D.C. staff had questions about four of the projects being rushed through for funding; three ultimately passed, while ours is getting more scrutiny. Our senators assured them the project does have local support, and we were granted the

Federal Funding Grant Agreement for \$500 million. While that funding is important, it is just as important to start that funding relationship—history shows that once a project has begun, funding usually continues. Now we need to win their confidence by doing good work. The six-month work plan says we will begin the big dig this June, and we need to show progress toward that goal. We need a room full of supporters!

The Panel then asked questions of Mr. Wilson and discussed the role of the Panel as the project goes forward:

#### Discussion

- Jay Laserwitz: Will you or Mary Jo be attending LRRP meetings? Paul and Mary Jo attended before, and we're looking for a similar commitment.
- Tuck Wilson: I understand the value of attending. On another subject, I was the Director for Tri-Met in Portland the last ten years, and during the 18 mile extension of Banfield. Ridership is climbing. The Westside project deliberately stimulated transit-oriented development.
- Paul Tomita: This is music to my ears. Sound Transit hasn't been getting the message out to the public; they need to see the potential for development that light link can stimulate.
- Tuck: You can help carry that message.
- Cheryl Sizov: The value of the Panel is partly in its ability to make the design process more transparent to the community, and to engage the public in design discussion.
- Tuck: Yes, and make the process more transparent to the Sound Transit Board. This is a partnership. We have decided to move forward to 90% design on all stations, and especially on the Southeast stations. We need to get the alignment decided so that people in the community know where the impacts will be.
- Matthew Kitchen: The six month work plan clearly focuses on larger questions about moving the project forward, but what is our role here? Given that schedule, how do we participate effectively?
- Mary Jo Porter: Yes, a lot of decision are being made and will be made clear within this six month timeframe. We will share all that with you. The decision is to go forward to 90% design, as mentioned before. Southeast Seattle needs to have some certainty.
- Rick Sundberg: The Panel is more than willing to be supportive—as we have been to date—but we need to know specifically what, at this point, we are supporting! And what the ramifications are. It is hard to defend the project to others without more information. We need to be briefed more thoroughly.
- Mary Jo: Within the next two weeks, we are preparing a "blue book" to describe what is going on with the entire system. The work of the Panel will be included there too. This will be a tidy package of information that will help people better understand the project.
- Tuck: Some of the Board's big questions will be: 1. An assessment of the risk of going under Portage Bay—the Board needs to give informed consent. 2. How much money could be saved in University Link, and whether to save and get to Northgate, or spend it all just to the U District. I think stopping at the U District is a mistake. So we need to find savings to get to Northgate and that means cuts in the project. Lastly, the Board needs to decide the alignment for Roosevelt.
- Mimi Sheridan: I am particularly concerned about property purchases as they impact station design; e.g. McClellan and the Firestone property. Also on First Hill.
- Mary Jo: Yes, we've heard support from many for a larger purchase there. All we can do is present the option to the Board. On First Hill, we are more tangential to the discussions, and leave that development to the City to figure out.
- Tuck: \$100 million is available for the Airport segment in the next three years. Congress reauthorizes the project in 2003.

- Paul: It sounds like you need to get that to the public in a way they can understand. Don't let the activists run with this information and spin it differently.
- Matthew: The theme running through the discussion is how to reconcile what we should be focused on. We—the Panel—need to understand what we're supporting. There is so much uncertainty regarding the MOS and the timing of what goes forward in the south end, yet we're on a tight schedule to keep reviewing 60% and then 90% design. This doesn't yet make sense to me.

With that, the discussion concluded and Tuck and Mary Jo joined the audience for the presentation on the Edmunds station.

## Design Development Briefing on the Edmunds Station

*Steve Arai, Arai Jackson*

*John Walser, Sound Transit*

The consultants for the Southeast stations were given a notice to proceed to final design in October, now we're working in conjunction with the civil team. There will be a community meeting on February 27<sup>th</sup> at the Rainier Beach Community Center to present 60% work. Note that the MOS (Minimum Operating Segment) is now called University Link, and Southeast stations are in what is called the Airport Link.

Changes to design since the last major LRRP review of Edmunds include:

- It is now a double-end loaded station, and therefore the platform has moved north between Edmunds and Alaska (farther from Edmunds).
- We have established train stopping locations at the center of the platform to give consistency to visually-impaired riders.
- We have shifted the canopy arrangement as a result of the decisions above.
- The communications building is now able to fit in a cabinet sized 6' x 3 ½' versus the 12' x 16' building previously envisioned.
- The plaza design is still being refined, and is subject to further discussion pending the outcome of the street reconfiguration discussion with you and with the community.

You saw the whole MLK Corridor at the last meeting, so you know that Southeast Seattle isn't one big neighborhood, but instead a series of smaller neighborhoods. We see each station as a "bridge" to the adjacent neighborhood(s). Since Edmunds is surrounded by residential, small-scale buildings, so we are pursuing a "garden trellis" theme with the station.

South Alaska is the modal link to the transit system, so it is important to serve that connection. The pedestrian link is served best along Edmunds Street. We are planning surface improvement consistent with the MLK Corridor work, including street trees in a somewhat random pattern here. Sidewalk pattern will continue up the platform approach, and once at the platform will change to a different treatment. Elements of continuity will include color, paving, materials on platform, placement of program elements (TVM), and signage. The plazas include bike parking and space for additional parking in the future. The architectural elements there are still evolving. At the platform, there are four ticket vending machine locations, and places for maps and an emergency phone. The fare paid zone is between the two end canopies, with the majority of canopy coverage in the middle where the trains will stop. 30% canopy coverage meets ridership projections. We're exploring a idea of lanterns at the entrance to each station—at Edmunds it is masonry pylons with glazed panels and artwork. The roof panels are a standard 4' size for ease of

maintenance/replacement. The cantilevered beams for the shelter are steel and put together from several pieces. The base is concrete with stone veneer and a precast cap—or we may make the cap stone and the base precast. The windscreen is glazing with a grid pattern over it. It is difficult to get good protection from the south wind, with only 12' available on the platform. Pedestrian-level lighting is proposed for the station areas and plazas only—not all along MLK. Fixtures will be the same for all stations, but housings can be different.

Carol Valenta updated the Panel on artwork for the Edmunds station, noting that the artists are aiming to highlight each station concept through art. At Edmunds, the concept is "craft, garden, trellis." Areas they are looking at for artwork include railings, top of pylons, decorative elements, etc. The Southeast Seattle Arts Council (SESAC) and Seattle Arts Commission were involved in selecting the artist, Gail McCall, from California. With the pylons, the idea is to have four sculptures, two at each end of the platform, each unique and yet relating to one another; each telling a story, and lit from below and within. These will frame the station. The ideas you see here this evening were done quickly over the last month and have yet to be refined in coordination with the architecture. We're also considering some plaza artwork. Vicky Fuller proposals are for some garden-related pieces, or also multiple sculptures (up to 8) amid the landscaping.

Before the Panel proceeded with discussion of the station design, Mike Johnson from Seatran presented five street reconfiguration alternatives for the Edmunds, 32<sup>nd</sup> SE, and MLK intersection. He said that the change in the station from single-loaded to double-loaded, coupled with the high number of children in the area (from several schools, notably Zion Prep off 32<sup>nd</sup> SE), has prompted some concerns in Seatran about the pedestrian safety of the existing street configuration in conjunction with the presence of a light rail station. The five alternatives, most of which have some restrictions on turning movements, include:

1. Keeping 32<sup>nd</sup> Avenue SE open (but with some changes to existing turning movements)
2. Closing 32<sup>nd</sup> Avenue SE while keeping Edmunds as is
3. Closing 32<sup>nd</sup> Avenue SE while reconfiguring Edmunds as a gentle curve
4. Creating a "Y" intersection with Edmunds and a relocated 32<sup>nd</sup>
5. Closing Edmunds west of the intersection with 32nd, directing traffic along 32nd

#### Panel Discussion

- I really enjoy the direction the design is taking—it is playful and interesting. I had envisioned the pylons as being more visible from the intersections, though. How far away from the intersections are they? (About 110 feet.) Can you pull them out farther, and let them function more as markers to the station? (It is hard to shorten the approach to the platform. It is in the middle right now.) But can't the pylons be moved independent of the station?
- I agree. Bring them closer to the street to define the entire platform. (The platform doesn't actually start until further in.)
- I also agree. The pylons should be farther apart. Also because the architecture of the pylons is in conflict with the architecture of the station. The language is contradictory.
- Separate them! (There is signage to be located at the start of the walkway too.)
- The pylon is potentially a strong marker itself. How will signage work with the pylons?
- The light built into the pylons should be more interrelated. Both are strong design elements.
- The "downspout" on the shelter is a not detailed as well as it could be—the diagonal element is distracting from the design.
- Build it into the structure; let it disappear into the structure.

- The Craftsman ideal of how things are put together isn't well-expressed in this shelter. The organization of the parts is not worked out. The connections between parts are awkward and discontinuous. The design is perhaps too complicated. For example, how was the cantilever for arrived at? The corner where all piece join is the "nut" of the design—explore it more!
- The back screen seems like an entirely separate element—and shouldn't.
- Check the raingap—there appears to be a dripline that falls inside the shelter.
- The vertical divides on the back screen should match the roof dividers—now they don't, and it reads as a disconnect.

The Panel then proceeded to discuss the street reconfiguration alternatives:

- Is through traffic necessary on Edmunds?
- How do we want to comment on the five alternatives? I suggest letting it go to the community to allow them to express a preference. Overall, this is very good work on Seatran's part in developing several alternatives for consideration.

Barbara Gray suggested that if the Panel sees any obvious urban design opportunities or drawbacks to any of the five alternatives, the community could benefit from hearing them.

- I don't like the ones that create small traffic islands. The one that closes Edmunds is intriguing in that it creates a nice plaza and collects a bunch of small parcels into one usable space. They noted that one negative of this option is that it cuts off the vehicle path to Columbia City.
- That option solves the cut-through traffic problem on Edmunds.
- Be careful of cutting off access to Columbia City, though.
- The alternative that closes Edmunds reminds me of Pine Street where the paving continues across. Pull all fragments of property together to achieve something. Try to look at the bigger picture.
- The wide curb bulb at Edmunds (curved street alternative) could be a good place for artwork or landscaping that would, in turn, create the visual connection with Columbia City.
- Vehicular access will be so changed anyway with the advent of light rail. I think the main issue is how residents on Edmunds Street feel about the various alternatives.
- Yes, it will be interesting to see what the community thinks about limiting cut-through traffic.
- How to the schools handle drop-off and pick-up for students?
- It would be helpful to show the community a larger site map so they can see the traffic implications for the whole neighborhood.
- The connection to Columbia City has been the focus of comments, and yet the Edmunds/MLK intersection can also be viewed as a symbolic fourth corner of the neighborhood (the other three being the Rainier Vista; the Columbia City Library and Cultural Center; and the heart of the Columbia City neighborhood business district).

#### **Action**

***The Seattle Light Rail Review Panel expresses appreciation to Tuck Wilson for attending and briefing the Panel on the latest developments regarding funding and project status.***

***After review of the Edmunds station design, the Panel does not recommend approval of the 60% design as presented, requesting more development of the following items—and another Panel review—prior to 90% design presentation:***

- *A more thoughtful interpretation of the Craftsman-style for the station shelter, particularly at the "joints" where the column meets the canopy beam and the windscreen and downspout connections, employing a simpler and cleaner approach to the detailing;*
- *Siting the pylons closer to the intersections (and further from the platform) to allow them to serve as markers to the station itself;*
- *Development of a more integrated design of station architecture, pylons, artwork, and lighting—acknowledging that there can be some dissonance between the art and architecture (not looking for a "match") but that they should still be perceived as parts of a whole;*
- *More detailed drawings showing the amenities and elements that go on the platform in elevation and/or perspective view (similar to drawings shared by Rick Sundberg from another transportation project); and*
- *A landscaping plan for the station and related plazas, showing the location of trees and other plants, and some indication of species.*

*In reviewing the five street reconfiguration proposals developed by SEATRAN, the Panel suggested further review after the community has expressed an opinion—and possibly a preference—on the five proposals. At that time, the Panel would also like to review other related improvements to Edmunds Street that Sound Transit is proposing, along with an updated design of the plaza at Edmunds to show the smaller cabinet-sized communications building along with the tie station and related screening and vegetation.*

The meeting adjourned at 6:15 pm.